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SUBJECT: WITH DEEP POCKETS, GOVERNOR ATTA LEADS CHARGE FOR
ABDULLAH

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Balkh Governor Atta is increasingly confident that his influence in the north will continue to attract supporters to Dr. Abdullah's campaign. He claims to have wrested Turkmen, Uzbek, Arab, and Hazara support from under the noses of ethnic Turkmen Minister Qarqin, Junbesh-e-Milli Chairman Sayed Noorullah, and Wahdat-e-Mardum leader Mohaqqueq. Atta confirmed that he is bankrolling Abdullah's campaign and mentioned that he had encouraged Zalmay Khalilzad to join their camp. Atta called into question the scrutiny of Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) over his support for Abdullah while seemingly giving other government officials a pass for supporting Karzai, saying he doubted IDLG's impartial stance in enforcing the Presidential Decree on the Non-interference of Government Officials in Electoral Matters. END SUMMARY.

Seeking Support from New Places

¶2. (SBU) Atta told State PRT officer July 5 that he is making progress in extracting pledges of support for Abdullah's campaign from influential persons in the north. He said ethnic Turkmen Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Qarqin recently visited Turkmen communities in an effort to shore up support for Karzai, but that those Turkmen villagers turned their backs on him and announced their support for Abdullah. Even three of four Turkmen Members of Parliament (Rozi Geldi Auichi "Khojein" and Shah Mardan Qul from Balkh province, and Haji Abdul Wahab, from Jowzhan province) have declared their support for Abdullah - a point conceded by Junbesh Party Chairman Noorullah. Atta refused to meet Qarqin during his stay in Mazar, leaving the minister no recourse other than to "cry all the way back to Kabul."

¶3. (SBU) Atta's poaching of supporters from other political leaders did not confine itself to Turkmen areas. He claimed that he has convinced several of Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum's ex-commanders to vote for Abdullah instead of Karzai, who the Junbesh Party is endorsing. Member of Parliament Haji Payenda Khan (Sar-e-pul, Arab) is one of them, and he will lead the Abdullah charge there. Fatiullah Khan and Shaikh Ahmad, both Junbesh MPs from Faryab, and Senator Haji Akbar Wahdat, are also with Abdullah, Atta claimed. Uzbek MP Ahmad Khan from Samangan, who leads a Junbesh Party faction, is apparently hedging his bets. Atta admits to having given Khan a large sum of money ("but not as much as he asked for") to campaign for Abdullah. However, MP Ghazanfar, a top Karzai campaign operative in the north as well as a Dostum supporter, regards Khan as Karzai's campaign manager in Samangan.

¶4. (SBU) Atta said some smaller ethnic Hazara political parties, like Harakat-e-Islami and Ensejam-e-Milli have also endorsed Abdullah (Harakat's Kabul-based leaders remain split between Karzai and Abdullah, while Ensejam is headed by United Front spokesman Sangcharaki). Atta said that even some members of Mohaqqueq's Wahdat faction - with the tacit consent of Mohaqqueq, no less - have switched their loyalties to Abdullah. More significant is the support Abdullah has garnered from Ustad Jafari, head of the Shia

Ulema Council in Balkh.

¶5. (SBU) According to Atta, several northern female MPs are also campaigning for Abdullah. Among them are Habiba Danesh (Takhar), Fawzia Kofi (Badakhshan), Fahima Sadat (Jowzjan), and Saifora Niazi (Balkh). As is common in Afghan politics, other reports put some of those MPs in the Karzai camp.

Financial Resources in Play

¶6. (SBU) Atta confirmed that he and Zalmay Khalilzad had met three weeks ago in Kabul after he had declined several earlier invitations by the former U.S. ambassador to meet. Reportedly, Khalilzad had seen President Karzai the day before meeting Atta, to "see if Karzai could reform his ways," but left the meeting convinced that Karzai could not. Atta tried selling Khalilzad on the benefits of teaming up with him to support Abdullah - an offer Khalilzad said he would have to ponder. He has not been back in touch with Atta about the matter.

¶7. (SBU) Atta volunteered that he is heavily bankrolling Abdullah's campaign, and recently sent him a second tranche of money to cover expenses. He has even put up some of his properties as collateral for bank loans. For Atta, there is no going back to the Karzai camp, regardless of what they offer him. It would be "shameful" if he were to do so, he explained.

¶8. (SBU) Atta chuckled when State PRT officer asked about the letter sent by the IDLG, which warned Atta against using government resources to support political candidates. His response to the IDLG

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rebutted allegations that he had ever done so. Atta instructed the IDLG to look within the Karzai administration to find those who are really guilty of using their government positions for campaign purposes, such as Palace Chief of Staff Mohammed Omar Daoudzai; Office of Administrative Affairs chief Sadeq Mudaber; Assadullah Khalid, Minister of Border and Tribal Affairs; Hanif Atmar, Minister of Interior; and Paktiya Governor Juma Khan Hamdard, among others.

¶9. (SBU) Closer to home, Atta noted that his own deputy governor, Zahir Wahdat, who is a Wahdat-Mardum supporter, had attended the pro-Karzai campaign rally at the Blue Mosque on July 3. Balkh TV even captured footage of the deputy governor seated next to Mohaqgeq, but there has been nary a peep from the IDLG about that, Atta asserted.

¶10. (SBU) Atta confirmed that he had recently received two letters signed by Karzai asking the Balkh Customs Department to exempt MP Ghazanfar's company from paying duty on the import of first 50,000 metric tons (MT) of fuel and then later, on another 30,000 MTs. Atta said the letters were cleverly worded to make the exemptions seem legitimate. At USD 160/MT, the exemptions total USD 12.8 million in customs revenues that will not enter government coffers. Atta suspects that some of that money will make its way back to Karzai himself in the form of campaign contributions from Ghazanfar.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) Atta has put Abdullah on the map in the north while refraining from criticizing Karzai publicly and from attending pro-Abdullah rallies. Given how easily political loyalties are swayed by wads of cash, we can expect that some of the individuals Atta counts in his corner may switch sides yet again. In Atta's view, the IDLG, tainted by politics, is practicing a double standard in its selective application of the Presidential Decree on the Non-interference of Government Employees in Electoral Affairs. The mission has emphasized to IDLG Director Popal the importance of the need to develop a consistent standard to enforce that decree, lest the IDLG subject itself to further allegations of partiality.

EIKENBERRY